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The eloquent line

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Background and introduction

The authors of this article are members of the Drawing Research Group (DRG) in the School of Textiles and Design, Heriot-Watt University, a group established with the aim of investigating the role of drawing in seeking inspiration, facilitating ideation and supporting communication in the fashion and textile design processes. Part of such investigation is the identification and analysis of the work of designers for whom drawing plays an important part in their design practice. As well as being an academic, Theresa Coburn continues to work as a designer of bespoke garments for artists in the music industry, work which involves both extensive and varied use of paper-based drawing and different forms of communication predicated on drawing. An earlier study tracked the diverse use of drawing in her design of a single garment (Coburn and Schenk 2017). Here, a selection of seven drawings has been made from Coburn's historic and current practice to explore how a fashion designer's drawings can communicate and act as a form of language in 'speaking' about visual, cultural and material issues, both to herself and to others. Her pared-down drawing practice, currently totally linear, consists of drawings for both private use and client presentation, and this variable employment of what we have termed the 'eloquent line' serves a multiplicity of purposes.

Although apparently simple, in some cases even seemingly casual, the drawings selected for analysis below are in fact quite complex and each drawing is, to a different degree, indicative of several characteristics of drawing activity. The communication value of each drawing is particularly pertinent and, for example, to 'whom' the drawing is meant to communicate, and 'what' is it meant to convey, are crucial features. The drawings are also important examples of a designer's immersion in, and expression of, the material cultures of fashion and fabric, and, at the same time, they are instructive in how they are used in aiding memory, supporting ideation, facilitating design development and presentation, and controlling construction. The purpose of the investigation was never to distinguish skills of draughtsmanship as such but rather to explore the use of drawing in a distinct form of design and to identify how a particular designer's drawing practice has evolved to fit the needs of the job.

As academics, the members of the DRG are, to some extent, motivated by the need to convince today's fashion and textile students to re-evaluate the special efficacy of paper-based drawing methods in creative design. Since the digital revolution drawing studies has been challenged on the curriculum of design courses and one of the DRG's aims is to re-evaluate contemporary drawing practice in a bid to reclaim a central role for drawing studies. It is important to encourage students to perceive the importance of drawing as a tool, not just as an outcome, and to prepare them for industry in the awareness that their creative potential will partly be judged by the creative thinking defined by their drawings. Future employers may well not be interested in their drawing skills but may judge the veracity of their claim for creativity and innovation from the drawn record of their designs. The future of design education must be in enabling humans to harness their modelling capability to design a sustainable future (Baynes and Norman 2012: 8).

Context and conduct of the investigation

Davidson (2011: 10) claims that, for fine artists, the most important overarching concept of contemporary drawing is 'intentionality', making specific choices for specific reasons. However, for designers, concentration is focussed on design decisions and not on the drawings through which these are made, and Lockard (1982: 30) has described the essential function of designerly drawing as a kind of 'transparency', where:

Design drawings represent successive attempts at drawing a congruence between the design problem and its solution. The drawings themselves are not the congruence, but are simply representative transparencies through which the real congruence can be judged. The importance of the transparency of design drawings cannot be overemphasised.

Designer's drawings are also principally private, intended for the use of the designer, teammates and clients and not for public display, and this private, albeit intrinsic role of drawing in creative design practice has been recognized and investigated over several decades (Schenk 1991; Garner 1992). Indeed, it was as far back as 1960 that Abram Games (1960: 8) described how his design drawings 'remain hidden from view like the bulk of an iceberg, while the final design, like the peak, is displayed for all to see.' Goel (1995: 12, 13) explains how design involves a complex array of cognitive processes and that, through drawing, different design disciplines employ distinct symbol systems. These symbol systems have different properties which affect their expressive capacities and cognitive functions. Thus, the cognitive functions involved in ideation, or creative thinking, are supported by provisional modes of drawing like sketches, doodles, working drawings, notations and rough drafts (Pigrum 2010: 4). While Goldschmidt (2003: 72), acknowledges the significance of these kinds of drawings, she also stresses how important it is that generic sketching evolves into professional design activity. In the context of the professional practice of fashion design, this comprises the capacity to comprehend the three-dimensional configuration of garments and to present them convincingly.

The relatively recent revival of drawing as a valued activity can, to some, extent be attributed to a growing need for 'slow time' as Freitas (2010: 2) termed it. The relative slowness of sketching by hand through sustained drawing activity can provide the necessary time and reflective opportunity for ideas to be fully absorbed and transformed in the mind. Coburn's recent work relies exclusively on the use of apparently simple line drawing, but the speed and care invested in that line, the intentions behind its use, and the eloquence with which it 'speaks' to stakeholders, is both involved and multifaceted.

The investigation described here began in a relatively informal manner, with regular discussion to identify key issues as the authors examined Coburn's portfolios of drawings representing designs from various stages of her career since the late 1980s. Their meetings then led to a structured evaluation of the range of drawings observed, with identification made of key types of drawings and of the tasks they performed, where necessary with reference to the literature (see, for example, Schenk 2016: 174-179). Being from different backgrounds, namely fashion design and design research, respectively, the authors were aware that they were approaching the drawn record of practice from different points of view. The designer was reassessing and finding new meaning in her past and current work, while the researcher was extending her established research with in-depth analysis of particular forms of practice. Through a combination of informal discussions and email queries explaining aspects of drawing activity and the analysis of the drawings, new insight was achieved for both researchers and is described in detail below.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005: 3) stress the importance of studying things [like drawings] and people [like designers] by attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Thus, the authors' approach started with basic questions concerning the experiences of the designer, following this with an exploration of the role of the drawings in the process of design (Moore and Williams 2014: 58). Ultimately, seven drawings were selected from different stages of the design process for in-depth analysis on the basis that they demonstrated different forms of communication, a selection guided by the

particular aspects of drawing activity the authors intended to investigate (Silverman 2013: 146). Coburn's comments, sometimes quoted verbatim, are from verbal and email discussions of these drawings.

While a single drawing was chosen from Coburn's early career to assist in elucidating formative influences, the majority were selected from recent commissions to investigate current practice. The implements and substrate used, speed and skill of execution, the task and role in the design process, spatial allusions and response to the visual culture of fashion were noted, and particular attention was paid to the employment of drawing as a language for communication.

Drawing, fashion and stagewear

In the early 1980s, when Coburn was a fashion student in London, drawing-based fashion illustration was challenging the popularity of photography in the presentation of fashion both because of the energy it evoked and because of the blurred boundaries of gender and sexuality it could depict (Morgan 2013: 4). Indeed, Borrelli (2008: 8) has emphasised the considerable value of fashion drawings in putting across emotions and intimate forms of expression. While, Coburn remembers being introduced to the work of influential illustrators like Colin Barnes and Antonio Lopez at college, for her the individual whose work most resonated was Jo Brocklehurst (Jenkins 2015). In Coburn's view, her images captured the zeitgeist and the counter cultural context of society she could identify with. Coburn found Brocklehurst's drawings chronicling life in underground clubs and 'squats' refreshing both in terms of her models and, particularly, their clothes. 'Her work felt like i-D magazine whereas Lopez felt like Vogue. Lopez was much more about glamour and fantasy and unattainable fashion whereas Brocklehurst captured the vibrancy and energy of punk'.

Figure 1: Theresa Coburn, fashion illustration for Siouxsie Sioux, 1987. Mixed media on coloured A2 cartridge paper.

The influence of Brocklehurst can be seen in the drawing in Figure 1, which, although produced early in Coburn's career, epitomizes the interests she still retains in the counter culture of the punk era. Specifically, it represents a design concept that she successfully presented to the musician *Siouxsie Sioux* as a fully styled illustration, in such a way as to depict the image of the artist on stage. In this, the largest and most elaborate of the selected drawings, chalk, paint and ink were used in a carefully crafted way to depict convincingly the qualities of the range of materials in the garment. She describes these materials and their interpretation as:

black stretch satin lycra, the stretch quality is represented in the skin-tight body conscious depiction of the garments which were embellished with contrasted white beading picked out in paint, for a sharper quality. Trimming from a feather boa is also used around the cuff and as a prop, and the feathery quality is represented in chalk to depict both volume and movement.

Although slightly elongated, the body is represented convincingly through a sinuous line reminiscent of some of Brocklehurst's drawings, and the range of black and white media is used to provide a convincing render of fabric and embellishment.

Produced with the intention of promoting a garment that was designed with an established stage persona in mind, Coburn's illustration showcases it by emphasizing only the most important visual elements of the outfit without the construction methods being evident. As she admits, such a drawing is about conveying a mood and is invariably conducted after the event, recording what has already been created. It is intended to persuade, rather than inform the client. She describes her current work for bespoke stagewear very differently, where the influence of dialogue with the client is paramount and a design is never offered as a fait accompli.

The exploitation of a shared, embodied and cultural memory that can be posited in costume plays a central role in the creation and communication of meaning in live performance (Barbieri 2012), and for many popstars and musicians their 'image' is almost as important as their music, a phenomenon much evident in the legacy of an artist like David Bowie. Stagewear is about the image that a performer wants to achieve to represent themselves to their audience, and helping these artists achieve that image is a particular specialization. Indeed, for a fashion designer working in this area the stage is a kind of catwalk. However, while performers appreciate help in the creation of a stage presence, the garment, albeit with exaggerated features, must still be practical for use on stage and enhance, not detract, from their performance. With the intricacy of this kind of brief, collaboration is inevitable. There has to be a dialogue with the client, and that dialogue must be both verbal and visual.

Bespoke stagewear: contemporary drawing practice

The collection of visual references for fashion design can take a number of forms, photographs, clippings and, of course, drawings. Designers benefit from the experience they gain in adapting and transforming information from a range of visual sources (Petre, et al, 2006: 189) and the drawings in Figures 2 and 3 demonstrate Coburn's different responses to different sources. Whereas the drawing in Figure 1 shows the use of a range of media indicative of fashion illustration, Coburn's more recent work relies exclusively on the use of line. Using a variety of manual implements produces a range of lines or additive traces (Ingold 2007: 7), and Ionascu (2017: 212) describes the importance of hand-crafted quills in creating the drawing style of the Middle Ages and how the modulated quality of the line itself may be a mark of craftsmanship for later artists. However, Coburn deliberately limits the number of line-making tools she employs, and the use of contemporary implements like the ballpoint pen and the fine liner epitomise her drawing style. It is the way that line is employed both in design progression and client interaction that mark it as both effective and eloquent.

Figure 2: Theresa Coburn, notation drawings for research and reference, 2017. Ballpoint pen in A6 notebook.

The double page spread shown in Figure 2. is taken from a pocket notebook kept for recording garment details for visual reference. In such circumstances, the sketch can be part drawing and part writing. In fact, the drawing itself almost becomes shorthand for writing. Coburn explains:

The drawings are not modified in any way as they are for my own benefit and I understand them. They take seconds and are freely put down. They are usually drawn with whatever media is at hand although, for this purpose, biro is my preferred medium. These drawings can be done in cafes, public transport or in the street. It is

necessary to draw as well as write, the written word would not record the shapes I have seen accurately - so I would forget them.

The drawings here are, in many respects, quite different from the drawing in Figure 1. They are not crafted in any way but quickly scribbled with the same kind of speed and energy seen in the written notations. A single implement is used for both drawing and writing to create rough depictions and hurried notes. Nevertheless, the line is *eloquent* because, with the minimum of means, all the necessary information is conveyed, and the drawings say more than words alone ever could. Rawson (1969: 1) describes how the marks that make up drawings have a symbolic relationship with experience and here they are indicative of designerly experience. The memory of recent observations of garments in shops and markets is transcribed into details that are workable in terms of fashion design. The importance to designers of developing visual memory through a combination of observation and memorization has long been acknowledged (Catterson-Smith 1922: 1), and it is also recognized that a designer who is visually literate, or possessed of an 'educated eye', will consistently and effectively seek inspiration from the world around them (Goldshmidt 2014: 212). These small, hurried drawings are indicative of the needs of the designer for a speedy notation of complex information intended for later recall.

Figure 3: Theresa Coburn, drawings from observation for research and reference, 2016. Ballpoint pen in A4 sketchbook.

Another set of drawings intended for the designer's own use but, in this case more carefully crafted, are shown in Figure 3. The physical act of drawing offers great flexibility in execution and, here, effort and time are invested not only in careful observation but also in interrogation of the appearance and construction of a classic garment, a vintage trench coat. Instead of the rapid scribbles shown in Figure 2, speedily drawn in odd moments, time has been invested in a thorough examination. Drawn from observation from an original Burberry raincoat, the designer is looking hard at the details of the garment such as the epaulettes, cuffs, fastenings and seams, and stitching details. This kind of drawing from 'life', not only improves understanding of the construction and styling of the original but also helps to suggest new interpretations that may be achieved by changing scale and introducing contradictions. Again, a simple line is used, but here it is employed to record and express accurately, based on intense scrutiny. Slow drawing allows time for new associations to be revealed before critical aesthetic decisions must be considered (Freitas 2010: 2).

The designer chose to analyse the construction and detailing of the trench coat to acquire visual references for a commission for a female singer who wanted to promote a powerful image through her stagewear. The choice of the trench coat, with its martial heritage as the main reference point for the commission, was indicative of the importance of the 'materiality' of garments in fashion design. These material qualities externalize particular cultural categories of identities (Woodward and Fisher 2014: 4), with the distinctive shape of military garments contributing to the association of masculinity and power (Peoples 2014: 7). What stands out here is the designer's experience in utilizing drawing eloquently as a means of providing useful cues for thinking and problem solving (Bilda et al 2006: 595) while anticipating the use of a classic garment to evoke the powerful yet androgynous image the client wanted to project (shown in Figure 6).

Figure 4: Theresa Coburn, early concept drawing, 2017. Pencil on A4 white office paper.

In the drawing presented in Figure 4, the designer works with loosely drawn pencil lines to explore the major features of a new garment. She conjures the balance of proportion of another classic garment, namely the track suit, while endeavouring to imbue the characteristic soft baggy shape with glamorous potential. At this early stage in the design process the drawing is very much concerned with the overall ‘look’ of the garment and so the unfinished nature of the drawing serves to enable further interpretation, as uncertainty drives invention in design (Scrivener et al 2000: 477). The eloquence in the lines of this drawing lie precisely in the insight they provide into the designer’s speculation. Their fluidity implies that no decision has been made on the final outcome; it indicates ‘ideas in motion’, a ‘suggestion’ of a garment drawn slowly to facilitate an initial exploration of silhouette and mood. The drawing also includes brief annotation as an *aide-memoire* or prompt for explaining initial ideas to the client at a later time, and such annotation is particularly pertinent when numerous initial ideas are being explored or when no decision has been made around, say, fabric choice.

Typically, this type of drawing, still commonly referred to as a ‘sketch’ by design researchers, facilitates the emergence of ideas because of its ambiguity (Oxman 2002: 137, 144; Stones and Cassidy 2010: 440). Invariably one of a set or series of drawings, the designer looks through to the shifting form envisaged beyond (Lockard 1982: 30). During ideation, the fashion designer does not focus on the lines of the drawing but rather envisions the garment itself, which is a consequence of the mental transfer from the actuality of the drawing to the material reality of the garment (Pallasmaa 2009: 59). For many designers, these types of drawing are the ones they prefer, perhaps by association with the freedom and potential for ideation they facilitate.

Figure 5: Theresa Coburn, design development drawings, 2016. Ballpoint pen in A4 sketchbook.

While a drawing like that in Figure 4 may be used to inform a discussion, it is unlikely to be shown to the client, whereas those in Figure 5 have been produced to help illustrate ideas during a client meeting, and they form part of a set presented for discussion and modified for further development. Part of the potential latent in line drawing is the opportunity for adaptation afforded. In these drawings the designer was not only exploring the shape of a sleeve (shown on the left) but was also considering the drape of the gathers and folds (shown on the right), as well as amending the lines to achieve an accurate visualization. Specifically, the drawings were used to show the adaptability of denim fabric, and an important aspect of the drawing here was to communicate the weight and flexibility of this fabric as closely as possible so the client could get a realistic idea of how it might hang. Denim is available in a variety of weights and will drape differently according to weight, and the designer depicted the heavier denim in the drawing on the left to provide the necessary stiffness for the sleeve and apron, while that on the right showed how a lighter denim would fold and drape. Evidently, the designer’s experience was intrinsic to the eloquence and communication value of these drawings. Just as the capacity of the designer to deconstruct the material culture of a classic garment was vital, as indicated above, the importance in fashion design of a designer being able to represent the behaviour of a fabric in drawn form, cannot be overestimated.

Furthermore, the capacity to demonstrate the properties of fabric in drawings, to depict the actual *material* of fashion, is reliant not only on the experience of seeing garments but also on the experience of making garments from cloth.

Figure 6. Theresa Coburn, client readable presentation drawings, 2016. Pencil and fine line pen on A3 cartridge paper.

While Figure 5 shows drawings produced at a mid-stage in the fashion design process to explore the feasibility of earlier concepts, in Figure 6 the main characteristics of the proposed garment are identified, although final choices are still to be made. Figure 6 shows one of the final presentation drawings for the stagewear commission evoking a classic trench coat referred to above (Figure 3 shows the information-gathering step in the design of this garment). Earlier, design development drawings had provided the underpinning for face to face dialogue in meetings between the designer and client but, in the case of this particular commission, such meetings had become impossible because of client relocation, and so it became necessary for the drawings both to sustain this visual dialogue and to communicate all the necessary graphic information. The basic garment was designed in response to the earlier feedback and agreement about proportion, silhouette and attention to detail, and several possible variations were presented for a final decision to be made. At this late step in the design process it was essential for the drawings to clearly represent what the client could expect to receive and envisage wearing on stage. Therefore, an accurate representation of the client wearing the finished article had to be shown in precise and detailed images. The designer has transcribed the client's reaction from a telephone call made on first receipt of the scanned drawing:

I loved that the drawings looked like me [...] and added an extra layer to the dialogue. I could see that the outfits were going to suit me. The drawings helped me think about the styling and how it would work on me, and the drawings that I thought I would love to look like were the designs I chose. I realized I became persuaded by the drawings. I would have been more closed-minded about a verbal description of the clothes without seeing the drawings. The drawings made it easier to choose the garments to go with.

The images show a variety of ideas defining a 'total look' which took styling and accessorizing into consideration. The style of drawing aimed to capture an image that the client could identify with, whilst promoting an idea of innovation through garment design. At an initial meeting with the designer, the client had explained how she liked to exude a powerful image and favoured androgynous clothes. She liked the idea of blurring boundaries and combating sexual stereotypes and found it empowering to challenge peoples' perceptions. As explained above, it was for such reasons that the designer suggested that a garment reinterpreting the classic trench coat, an emblematic garment with both utilitarian and high fashion connotations, would be applicable (Rodriguez McRobbie, 2015). Interestingly, Pass (2014: 31) describes the intentions of fashion designers like Jean Paul Gaultier, Alexander McQueen and Olivier Theyskens in producing women's clothes with a militant, masculine quality as a way of 'arming' their wearers. Citing the trench coat and its military heritage, the designer's drawings here eloquently depict garments that, while evidently for a woman, evoke a feeling of strength and power. While classic garments have been produced in certain specific fabrics like, for example, gaberdine in the case of the trench

coat, the aim here was to decontextualize them in non-traditional fabrics, contradicting the masculinity of the original with the use of heavy satin and fringe.

Scale is an important part of the meaning of a drawing (Rawson 1969:1), and it should be noted that these drawings are the largest in scale of the more recent drawings discussed here. In comparison to the small scribbles in a convenient little notebook shown in Figure 2, it is evident in Figure 6 that, from the outset, the designer has set out to create careful and considered communication by purposeful selection of both type and size of paper. In the drawings the individual garments are clearly shown with precise proportions and silhouette. Both front and back views are detailed and drawn in a way that accurately depicts how the final garment will look. Unlike the earlier drawings illustrated in Figures 2 to 5, a relatively laborious representational procedure is employed with the image being initially roughed out in pencil and then drawn over with a fine line pen, after which the under-drawing is rubbed out. Attention to design and construction detail becomes more evident through inclusion of a suggestion of topstitching lines around the collar, pockets, and the depth of hem. Moreover, the satin fabric used for the trench coat has been drawn in a solid line to denote its weight.

Figure 7: Theresa Coburn, drawings to work out construction methods, 2016. Ballpoint pen on A3 photocopy.

Finally, once the main creative stages of the design process were complete and the client had made her final selection, the drawing activity became ‘private’ once more, underpinning the thought processes that a designer embarks upon in considering the production of the garment. Drawing was employed as a form of shorthand to work out how details and features within the garment might be constructed. Thus, in Figure 7, the process of overdrawing and annotating a photocopy of the final design can be seen. The designer affirms that, when working out a production technique, she always draws it, this being the only way that she can problem-solve when planning making the garment. Used solely for the benefit of the designer to envisage the process of making, drawing remains the best and, sometimes, the only way to proceed, as it links directly to the visual manifestation of the product that the designer is assembling. Hence, the detailed and accurate presentation drawing of the garment (shown in Figure 6 above) is repurposed in Figure 7 to help inform the construction of the garment through the production of relatively informal but nonetheless accurate specification drawings.

Summary and conclusions

Despite the extensive existing investigations into design drawing, more research is needed to capture how designers work in real time, documenting the tacit and implicit knowledge contained in each designer’s creative process (Lee and Danko 2017: 660). If design students are to be convinced that gaining and maintaining drawing competence is worth their effort, clear evidence of the use of drawing in contemporary design practice is essential. Students should also be able to ‘read’ the working drawings of other designers because of the insight into the real world of innovation that they reveal.

Of the seven drawings discussed above, three are intended to serve the self-reflection of the designer, three for communication with the client, and one is meant mainly for the designer but is annotated to facilitate the transmission of the information contained. The *eloquence* of the drawn line is in its adaptability to meet the prerequisites of such exchanges. It is evident

that the time invested in crafting for communication must be appropriate, with only seconds spent in recording the memories of, say, garment details recently seen in a shop for the designer's own use as reference, but with more prolonged attention being given to carefully laying out and overdrawing for the exactitude of client presentation. When thought of as a form of language, the designer's line can record, plan, interrogate, inspire, ideate, present, persuade and facilitate a meld of cultural allusions.

The eloquence of line employed is particularly germane for the representation of an item in three dimensions. Quite evidently garments have a changeable shape and volume depending on how they are worn or whether in movement, etc. Each of the seven drawings above represent spatial aspects of garments in different ways, and the resolution and clarity of the spatial information shifts between them. In Figure 1 the image is very graphic and two-dimensional with a sensuous outline defining the figure and minimal modelling. In Figure 2 the drawings are flat and minimal. In contrast, a greater impression of the garment being three-dimensional is given in Figure 3 with the delineation of the shape of the collar, but concentration is directed at the decorative effects of the details. In Figure 4 a fluid, undefined, potential volume is proposed, while in Figure 5 a clear indication is given of how a flat fabric will form a three-dimensional shape. In Figure 6, three-dimensional figures, having volume and weight, are convincingly shown in the space occupied, while Figure 7, which is copied from 6, functions like a designerly palimpsest and serves to show the construction of an actual three-dimensional garment. Designing in two dimensions for three is ably facilitated by a linear drawing style that is both apposite and adaptable because the designer here is also the maker, and the garment is the outcome, not the drawings.

When the drawn outputs from different stages of the design process are carefully analysed based on the criteria mentioned above, namely what drawing tools were used (and why), what was the main vehicle of communication (here, the line), what was the relative speed at which drawing was performed, who was the drawing intended to communicate with, what did it have to communicate, how eloquent was the communication, what task did the drawing perform, and where was this task located in the design process, the versatility of drawing for diverse communication is convincingly demonstrated. Drawing can be used for many different tasks such as for reference, for ideation, for capturing styles/moods, for influencing clients, and for aiding final production, etc., and the speed at which drawing is conducted and the detail in the drawn output will vary appropriately. Thus, drawing lends itself to many forms of communication, private communication to capture ideas or reference, self-reflection/communication to stimulate ideation, communication to influence the client, and communication of fine detail to aid final production. Further analysis of the drawings can reveal much about the skill/craft of the designer, their ability to understand visual and cultural reference, and their capability in understanding material culture. More particularly, analysis of drawings will reveal how appropriately such drawing skills are used at each stage of the design process. Drawing is highly effective for communication, but this needs to be an appropriate use of drawing for a particular form of communication. Against this background, as well as learning the prerequisites of their chosen profession, young designers should at the same time be encouraged to establish their own unique drawing practice to achieve more effective and more appropriate communication throughout the design process.

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